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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study the effects of men's attitudes toward the principles of the women's liberation movement as a function of their own self-esteem. The author hypothesizes that males found to have high levels of self esteem will have favorable and positive attitudes toward women's liberation while men with low levels of self esteem will oppose the principles of the women's rights movement. Male subjects for the study were chosen from five different college settings; a sixth sample of a non-college population was also included in the study. Subjects were first administered the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, followed by the Women's Liberation Questionnaire (WLQ). Findings from the study in general support the author's hypothesis; however, males who attend large, state, and non-religiously affiliated institutions were more approving of the principles of the women's liberation movement than those who attend small, religiously affiliated or private schools. The non-college sample compared most closely with the former group. References are included. (Author/SES)

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MALE ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS A FUNCTION OF THEIR LEVEL OF SELF ESTEEM[1]

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One of the most pressing issues of our time appears to be that of women's rights. Much has been offered within a hypothetical framework with the bulk of research efforts being descriptive in nature. A provocative beginning to the women's liberation movement emerged with the publication of The Feminine Mystique (Frieden, 1970). The liberated women being a product of an activist oriented, militant tempered social framework, appeared to stimulate a variety of changing attitudes and viewpoints from a basically male dominated American society. A dimension which is attributed to these changing male attitudes is one related to ego strength and concept of self. Rogers (1959) theorized that persons with weak ego strength would be least able to attain their own goals and would very likely find it extremely difficult to accept the goals and values of others. Ausubel (1952) indicated that self esteem was the result of achieving a status commensurate with one's conception of his own self importance. He suggested that a devaluation of self concept may well result if ego importance is devalued.

It is thus concluded that persons with low levels of self esteem would most probably be threatened by a liberally oriented women's rights movement whereas persons with high levels of self esteem would tend to be less threatened.

Self esteem is herein defined as a person's perception of his own self worth. Festinger (1954) has suggested that a person's perception of himself and his self worth is largely a function of his social frame of reference.

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This is to say that if the social attitude is altered, as might be accomplished through a shift in women's rights, a corresponding change in level of self esteem may be anticipated in men who tend to possess moderate to low levels of self esteem.

Worell and Worell (1971) researched the question of personality characteristics which clearly distinguish men and women who support and oppose the women's liberation movement. Their findings suggest that men who oppose women's liberation are more concerned with social status, with being proper and respectable. They tend to be controlled by the opinions of others and have lowered confidence in their ability to guide their own destiny. In dealing with others, they tend to be rigid, conforming, inflexible, and submissive to authority. Contrary to this, these researchers found that the male who supported the women's liberation movement was a more independent, capable, thoughtful, self determined person who considered the world from a logical point of view. They concluded that because he appears secure in his own capabilities, and is less dependent upon the opinions of others, he does not fear social change.

The purpose of the present investigation is to study the effects of men's attitudes toward the principles of the women's liberation movement as a function of their own self esteem. As Worell and Worell have found that personality characteristics are uniquely consistent with attitudes toward women's liberation, so to, it is hypothesized that self esteem is consistent with attitudes toward women's liberation. It is, therefore, hypothesized that males found to have high levels of self esteem will have favorable and positive attitudes toward women's liberation while men with low levels of self esteem will oppose the principles of the women's rights movement.

Method

Subjects were chosen at random from five different college settings in Northeastern United States. A sixth sample of a non-college population was also included in the study. In all, 171 male subjects were assessed. With the exception of the non-college sample, the males participating in the study represented a predominately white, middle and upper middle class population. The non-college sample can be demographically considered a middle class sample. No efforts were made to control for age, race, or major fields of study.

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965) was employed to assess the subjects level of self esteem. The items of the Self Esteem Scale were rated by each subject on a four point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The Women's Liberation Questionnaire (WLQ) developed by Dove and Miller (1970) was used to assess attitudes toward the principle of women's rights and the role of women in present day American society. The questionnaire contains twenty statements with each statement being rated on a six point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Subjects were administered the Self Esteem Scale afterwhich the Women's Liberation Questionnaire was administered. The rationale for this included the fact that it was crucial to obtain an accurate estimate of self esteem prior to questions related to the women's liberation movement. All questions were uniformly distributed and subjects were given no time limits. Pearson product-moment correlations and t-tests were used to assess the relationship between variables and differences between groups studied.

Results

Correlations were realized between attitudes toward women's liberation and the self esteem of the subjects in four out of the six groups. A significant relationship was found in small, private, predominately male collegiate

institutions and in the non-college sample. For the two private, religiously affiliated, predominately male colleges, correlations of r=.49 (p .05) and r=.31 (p .05) were realized. The private, predominately male technical college yielded a correlation of r=.41 (p .05). A correlation coefficient of r=.48 (p .05) was achieved in the all male, non-college sample. No significant relationship was realized for the large, coeducational state university or the small coeducational, non-religiously affiliated institution.

Significant mean differences existed between the non-college sample and males in the large coeducational-state institution (t=3.6,p .05); the coeducational, religiously affiliated institution (t=8.5,p .01); the male technical institution (t=3.8,p .05); and the two male-religiously affiliated institutions (t=2.9,p .05; t=2.6,p .05). Significant mean differences were also realized between the response of male students in the large coeducational state institution and those in the male-technical institution (t=4.4,p .05) as well as those in the male-religiously affiliated institution (t=4.5,p .05).

Discussion

With the selected purpose of examining the relationship between male attitudes toward women's rights and the self esteem of the all male samples, the findings reveal that acceptance of principle issues related to the women's rights movement seem to be significantly related to high levels of self esteem in those males studied.

In attempting to study a variety of college student populations, the data indicated notable differences among some of the male student samples. Perhaps the most salient feature of these results is the emergence of socio-cultural characteristics which seem to identify some characteristics of males attending different types of college institutions. It would appear that males who attend large, state, and non-religiously affiliated institutions are

generally more approving of the principles of the women's liberation movement. On the other hand, the males who attend, small, religiously affiliated or private institutions appear to be less approving of the principles of women's rights. The non-college sample compared most closely with the small, religiously affiliated or private college group and perhaps the same conclusions could be offered for this sample.

With minimal exception, it appears that the small predominately male and more conservatively oriented private colleges attract to their student population males who have less of an appreciation for women's rights than their counterparts on larger, state and coeducational campuses. It is of further interest that male self esteem on the smaller, religiously oriented campus is related to the male students' attitude toward the principles of women's rights. Where attitudes toward women's liberation are more conservative, male levels of self esteem are found to be lower. Self esteem does not seem to be affected by attitudes toward women's rights in larger, non-religious, coeducational institutions.

An issue which emerges and offers interesting research possibilities is one which questions whether the institution, by means of its size and orientation, shapes more liberal attitudes toward women's rights or whether the selection of the institution of higher learning is related to self concept of the male student applicant. While these and other issues remain to be answered, present findings confirm that male attitudes toward the women's rights movement are a function of self esteem.

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